

Arrowhead Age-Friendly Exchange

November 3, 2025

Community Priorities and Perspectives

Overview

Age-Friendly Minnesota (AFMN) partnered with Arrowhead Area Agency on Aging (AAAA) to host the Arrowhead Age-Friendly Exchange on November 3, 2025 in Chisholm, Minnesota. This was one of six Regional Exchanges held across the state in fall 2025.

More than 70 cross-sector attendees gathered at the Chisholm Discovery Center to learn and share about age-friendly work happening in the region and the state, and to explore opportunities ahead.

This summary presents themes and highlights from the event so that attendees and other regional partners and community members can see key takeaways from the event, and use them to help guide and inspire age-friendly work moving forward.

Pulse Check: What We Heard from the Community

The event included a presentation from the Age-Friendly Minnesota Council about its big areas of work, including the [grants program](#) and the [Multisector Blueprint for Aging](#), and new developments over the past year.

Later, attendees discussed the following question in small groups and with the full room as part of a “Pulse Check” conversation:

For all Minnesotans to live well as we age in community:

- *What are some potential realistic solutions?*
- *What progress has been made on key issues and gaps?*

The Pulse Check was a critical part of the Exchange. It created an opportunity for reflection and discussion among attendees, who could then share their ideas and insights with each

other, with regional leaders, and with Age-Friendly Minnesota. AFMN captured this input and is sharing it back to the community through this document.

Below is a summary of the most frequently mentioned topics, as well as ideas and issues related to finding solutions. These are far from exhaustive; instead, a glimpse into priority issues and possibilities.

Community Opportunities: Challenges and Solutions

• **Built Environment**

• **Policy opportunities:**

- **Lower speed limits** to increase safety for all.
- **Use universal design principles consistently** to ensure new or updated investments in our built environment are being designed with all people in mind.
- **Improve crosswalk safety** through increased use of flashing crosswalks or similar measures.
- **Create/provide all-season walking facilities** so that people have safe, accessible places to be active year-round.
- **Prioritize and invest in sidewalks** – build them, maintain them, and keep them clear of snow and ice.

• **Service Access**

- **Raise awareness of existing resources** – namely Minnesota Aging Pathways (former Senior LinkAge Line,) a free, statewide resource which is often underutilized.
- **Use gas stations/convenience stores as resource points;** these are under-valued community assets.

• **Communication, Connection, and Inclusion**

- **Explore/expand use of strategic approaches to better communicate resources,** for example:
 - **Use low-tech communications, such as targeted postcard mailings** – while there is a cost, this has proven more consistent and effective than digital communications.
 - **Educate healthcare providers** about area resources and equip them to share this information with patients. Many providers are not from the area and aren't familiar with available resources.
 - **Utilize and expand use of Community Health Workers** to reach and share information with older adults.

- **Establish point person in each city in the region to keep local information;** those point people can meet regularly to confer and share information.
- **Better position Arrowhead AAA help bridge gaps.**
- **Housing**
 - **Increase investment in home modifications** to help people remain living in the community.
 - **Create tax rebates/credits for developers in rural MN**, as is done for film industry.
 - **Empower local residents to be developers in their own communities**—lending, financing, etc.
- **Transportation**
 - **Explore/expand promising models:**
 - A partnership between MnDOT, City of Carlton, and Arrowhead Regional Development Corp., and Carlton County resulted in safety improvements to a crosswalk in a critical location. An AFMN Grant also helped fund accessible entry to Volunteer Services of Carlton County near this crosswalk.
 - **Tap University of MN Duluth rural healthcare students/interns** as resource.
 - **Encourage older adults to do part-time work/volunteering** related to transportation.

This input, along with community input gathered through the other Regional Exchange events, is being shared back to communities and will be integrated into Multisector Blueprint work as it continues to evolve.

Progress is happening!

In addition to the ideas and solutions above, attendees highlighted examples of regional progress to celebrate and build on.

- With leadership from the Ely Housing Redevelopment Authority, a new 37-unit-building is being constructed near the local hospital, helping address the community’s housing shortage.
- Numerous cities and counties in the region have joined the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities in recent years, demonstrating a growing understanding of and commitment to this work.
- More community discussions are being held focused on age-friendly topics and engaging community members and partners.
- An increasing number of projects that support cross-generational interaction are being developed, such as pickleball and parks.
- Services providers are noticing better integration and collaboration.

Regional Age-Friendly Projects

AFMN is proud to have invested more than \$1 million in Arrowhead-based projects through 20 Community Grants since 2023. These grants are advancing goals of Minnesota's [Multisector Blueprint for Aging](#), which is grounded in community voices and is addressing many of the issues that emerged from the community at the Central Age-Friendly Exchange.

Several grantees and a few other organizations attended the Exchange to share information about their age-friendly projects and impacts:

- [Northspan Group](#) is creating a comprehensive training program for business and organizations to implement “returnships,” which are structured job opportunities designed for older adults re-entering the workforce.
- [St. Louis County Public Health](#) is working with the county’s emergency preparedness team to integrate older adults into response plans.
- [Ecolibrium3](#) is convening regional partners to develop a new plan to create public awareness about putting an age-friendly lens on housing affordability and accessibility. They are also expanding workforce training on age-friendly built environment approaches.
- [Lutheran Social Service of MN](#) is hosting listening sessions for rural LGBTQ+ older adults to build resilience in those communities through shared information about formal and informal supports.
- [Aitkin County CARE](#) is providing and sharing information about critical transportation services to older adults in the county.

Find more information about AFMN Grants at the [AFMN website](#).

Learn more!

This work hinges on collaboration. We encourage you to reach out with questions, concerns, and ideas.

Age-Friendly Minnesota:

- Website: [Age-Friendly Minnesota](#)
- Email: mn.dhs.AgeFriendlyMN@state.mn.us

Led by the Age-Friendly Minnesota Council, AFMN champions vibrant communities where we thrive as we age. We do this through collaborative partnerships, community engagement, and innovative strategies. Age-Friendly Minnesota creates and nurtures systems that include and value all Minnesotans as we grow older.

Arrowhead Area Agency on Aging (AAAA)

- Website: [Arrowhead Area Agency on Aging](#)
- Phone: [218-722-5545](#)

AAAA is the agency designated by the state to address the needs and concerns of all older persons at the regional and local levels in the Arrowhead Region.

AAAA contracts with local service providers to deliver many direct services, such as meals, caregiver support programs, transportation, and in-home services.

Planning staff with the AAAA work to address service gaps in the region, provide support to partner organizations, and provide advocacy for aging services.

